PRESERVATION RACINE, INC.

NEWSLETTER
WINTER 2011

Christmas Greetings From Racine

Twenty-three years ago Don Rintz wrote the following article for the winter 1988 Preservation Racine Newsletter. It is about the Christmas cards that were made here in Racine by Western Publishing Company. At the end of this article is an update by Roberta Fiene, a member of the newsletter committee at that time, about collecting these cards.

The editors

The modern custom of sending greeting cards at the Christmas holiday season began in London almost 150 years ago. In 1843, at the urging of a friend, the British artist, John Calcott Horsley, designed the first Christmas card, which was essentially in the form we are familiar with today. It was a post card lithographed in black and white and colored by hand. Probably no more than a thousand were printed, and what may have been the very first of them was sent by the artist to the friend who had suggested it, Henry Cole—the English educator and arbiter of Victorian taste, who was later to be knighted by Queen Victoria.

It was not until 1875 that the first Christmas cards were manufactured in the United States. In that year, Louis Prang—who is considered the father of the American Christmas card—began to print such seasonal greetings for the home market at his plant in Roxbury, Massachusetts, now a part of Boston. From that beginning grew the huge American greeting card industry of today. This year, according to the Greeting Card Association, more than two billion Christmas cards will be bought and sent.

For almost thirty years, some of those billions of Christmas cards were made here in Racine by the Western Publishing Company. In 1929 Western bought the Stationer's Engraving Company, which produced engraved stationery and greeting cards. For two years that operation remained in its original building in Chicago, after which it was moved to Racine and consolidated with the Whitman Publishing Company, a wholly owned subsidiary of Western. In 1931, according to

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Western's company magazine, "Whitman jumped into the greeting card business in a big and important way." A Greeting Card Division was established, headed by Myron O. Lawson, who brought to this new job his twenty years of experience with design, color, and plate making in Western's Photo Engraving Department. By the time Lawson retired in 1956, he had become, according to the *Journal Times*, "One of the top greeting card executives in the country," and he had built the Whitman line to a volume of 120,000,000 cards per year, which by then also included valentines.

All Whitman greeting cards were designed by free lance artists who submitted sketches for the approval of the Greeting Card Division. Verses were selected in the same way. Hundreds of writers who specialized in greeting card sentiments also worked for Whitman on a free lance basis. Sometimes the company requested of a particular writer a sentiment suited to a specific illustration. Artwork and verse were made ready in Western's production department and the cards were almost invariably printed by the offset lithographic process on huge printing presses which could reproduce full-color illustrations in one trip through the machine.

Most Whitman Christmas cards were made to be sold in the syndicated stores—the "five and dimes," like Woolworth's and Kresge's—where the entire Whitman line of children's books, puzzles, and games was most likely to be found. Many of the cards were manufactured to retail at four for five cents or two for five cents (at a time when this country still had a good five-cent nickel), or three for ten cents, and five or ten cents apiece. "In quality," Western's company magazine proudly asserted, "they are comparable . . . to many cards in higher price brackets all the way up to 25 cents each." (That, of course, was also back when this country did not yet have a five-cent quarter.) Whitman also produced colorfully boxed Christmas cards in assortments of 25 or 50 cards and envelopes.

A line of high-quality cards was manufactured under the colophon of the Artists and Writers Guild—a name which was owned by Western and incorporated in 1935 as a separate division for design and publication, with headquarters in New York City. A few Christmas cards were created individually for corporate customers: One such card, produced for the General Drafting Company, won an award for its graphic design in 1954, and another, created for the Outboard Marine Corporation, won a similar award in 1957. A number of religious cards were crafted for the Chatechetical Guild—a Minnesota firm which published books for Catholic churches and schools and which was eventually purchased by Western and became one of its many subsidiaries. In 1957 ten paintings by Sister Monica—who was then the head of the Art Department at Dominican College in Racine—were reproduced on Christmas cards to be sold by the Guild. Twenty cards—two of each painting—were included in an assortment under the title "Nativity Box."

Considering the millions of cards Whitman produced, few are to be found today. The Racine County Historical Society and Museum has only four in its files—all of them very probably from the early 1950s. Roberta Fiene has come up with about thirty more by advertising for them and by consulting with a Christmas card collector. Fortunately, Dorothy Elsner—who used to work in the Greeting Card Division—donated most of the cards we now have, and she noted on them the years when they were produced. Despite a concerted search made for them at flea markets this past summer, I have not been able to turn up any others. They were cheaply purchased and easily discarded with the Christmas wrappings and

the denuded Christmas tree. No one seems to have saved them.

Carl Gildemeister—a member of Preservation Racine who is retired from Western— was the foreman in charge of greeting card production during the years after World War II when the number of Christmas cards produced by Whitman grew every year. "Myron Lawson would go out once a year on a selling trip," Carl recounted, "and he would come back with orders for millions of cards." The orders kept his department busy all year long. "In the summer," Carl recalled, "I'd have to hire a couple of hundred high school and college kids to do finish work by hand on our Christmas cards." Inflation eventually killed the Whitman line. Carl explained that a Hallmark card printed in four colors could be sold for a quarter in a fancy gift shop, but Whitman cards of the same quality had to be priced at a nickel or a dime at the variety stores where they were most often found. The profit margin dwindled and greeting card production was discontinued in the early 1960s.

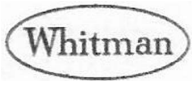
As I remember them, Whitman Christmas cards were never "artsy" or ponderous or cloyingly reverent. Those few which have so far surfaced bear me out. They are all colorful or playful—embossed, flocked, or glittered. (The flocking was an innovation developed by Western here in Racine.) They flaunt the traditional symbols of an American Christmas: candles, candy canes, ivy and holly, wreaths and poinsettias, children, cherubs, and choirboys, snowflakes and sleighs, santas and snowmen, crèches and Christmas trees. Today's Christmas cards, it seems to me, are all too muted, too carefully color-coordinated, too refined, and too consciously tasteful. They lack bravura—the brash glitz and the primary colored glow of Whitman Christmas cards. They were elegant in the flashy, dime-store way that made me long for Christmas tinsel when I was a kid, and they can lift the scowl of Scrooge from my face even today. They are snippet spirits from Christmas past, which I robustly enjoyed and dotingly remember.

Don Rintz

Collecting Christmas Greetings Made in Racine

Twenty-three years ago, at a planning meeting for the winter 1988 *Preservation Racine Newsletter,* Don Rintz said he would like to write an article about the Christmas greeting cards that were made in Racine by Western Publishing Company. A few weeks later, when the committee met again to read all of the material submitted for the newsletter, Don read the article he had written. As always, his work was well researched, informative, and entertaining. I had not previously known about these locally produced greeting cards and was intrigued by the few that the committee had collected to illustrate the article, but they were hardly a fair representation of the millions that were printed.

Nineteenth century Christmas trade cards and greeting cards were eagerly collected and saved, many of them in lavishly decorated scrapbook pages. Were Christmas cards of the 1930s and 40s still treasured enough to be found in scrap books, or just where would I find more of these Whitman cards, which can be identified by the following marks, usually on the back of the card:



Artists & Writers Guild cards have the following marks:

Being a member of "The Golden Glow of Christmas Past," an international organization of collectors of antique Christmas memorabilia, I started by placing an ad in the organization's newsletter. A member who lived in Michigan and who lectured on the history of the Christmas card answered my ad and found some cards for me over the next few years.

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It wasn't long before another member of "The Glow" gave me a large box of salesman's samples of Whitman greeting cards that he had found at a flea market in Princeton, Wisconsin. They are mounted on cardboard and were probably carried in a salesman's briefcase to show his clients. Many of them are the brightly flocked, die-cut cards for children. I have been able to date them as having been offered to the public for the 1949 Christmas season.

I also tried Don's approach of frequenting flea markets but rarely found any Christmas cards to look through. The same can be said for estate sales. Some were found at antique shows. National conventions and regional meetings of The Glow have usually been a good source. Others have come from friends and members of Preservation Racine.

A few years ago, I purchased some cards on eBay and found a collector/dealer in Oregon who was interested in topical cards and willing to trade for graphics that her clients were looking for. She found some excellent examples for me, but her sources were often scrapbooks, which left a pas e and paper residue on the back of the card. I have occasionally seen scrapbooks for sale with Christmas cards from the 1930s and 40s, but there is no guarantee that there would even be one Whitman card among them.

Finding cards in their original postmarked envelopes or a card in which the sender dated it or a message inside the card is what most collectors hope for and which helps define a collection. Only ten percent of those I have found have yielded a date, but observing Christmas card trends over the years (paper, size, shape, graphics) has helped put most of them in chronological order.

Although Whitman began publishing Christmas cards in 1931, the earliest dated card I have found is 1938; the latest card is 1961, probably one of the last that the company printed. The early cards that I have found are small with traditional Christmas symbols, such as poinsettias, holly, candles, bells, and outdoor winter scenes, and are often printed on a parchment-like paper.

In the early 1940s there are sweet little cards for children with graphics on partial fronts, with the

printing on the inside of the card completing the scene. Later in the 40s, probably on cards that cost a penny or two more, glitter accents the snow, and flocking defines Santa's suit, poinsettias, candles, etc. Gold and silver foil enhancements are sparse and disappeared altogether during WWII, but returned after the war.

Cards gradually became larger and colors, brighter, and in the 1950s, the shape of Whitman cards followed the trend of Hallmark's "Slim Jim," a tall slim card. Although traditional designs and colors continued to be used, artists were more imaginative in their use. An artist's signature is rarely seen on the cards, Eve Rockwell being the only one I have found more than once. She was a free-lance artist who drew adorable children and whose work can also be found on other lines of greeting cards.

A card with the same design was occasionally employed in different ways— a generic greeting card or one for family members, such as for mother, father, daughter, and son, of which I have found nineteen different examples. Sometimes a smaller card was offered in two or three larger sizes either by enlarging the design or enhancing it with a simple or lavishly embossed border. I have not been able to tell if these options were available

the same year or if it was a restaging of the design in later years.

Christmas wallet cards came with a dollar of "Educational Toy Money" by Whitman in the pocket which was meant to be replaced with a real bill. The verse reads: You can "bank" on my wishes that you "spend" a Merry Christmas. Colorful money cards for children were made of heavy paper about a sixteenth of an inch thick with ten holes inside which would snugly hold ten dimes. Western was already in the "money" business, printing play money for Whitman games and publishing books about coins.

After looking at thousands of cards, the colors, topics, graphics, and artists employed by Whitman begin to emerge and I am often able to identify them as such. However, I continue to look at the backs of the cards for the manufacturer's name or logo for those that don't have any traditional Whitman characteristics. Some seem to be unique among the Whitman cards and do not fit into any category. The best example I have is a larger card with an extremely detailed drawing of Reims Cathedral in muted colors. I have also found cards previously identified as Whitman that do not have any markings. Was this an oversight or were they made for another market?

Over the years I have collected Christmas cards in a few of my favorite categories without regard to their manufacturer. One of these categories is the patriotic Christmas card for both the service person and those on the home front. Some are the traditional Christmas icons done in red, white, and blue, while others have war related graphics. Did Whitman not make some patriotic Christmas cards during WWII? I have not found any.

The boxed sets of cards usually have a theme. My collection includes a box of "Glad Tidings, 25 Religious Greetings with Scripture Text, 59¢." This is probably from the 1950s. The cards in another box titled "Season's Greetings" are simple in design and printed in red, white, and black. As the Depression came to an end, Western signed a contract with Walt Disney, which gave Western exclusive rights to Disney's major characters. It appears that Western printed at least six different Disney cards, which were most likely sold in a boxed set of six or eight different designs. Books of Christmas cards and envelopes were printed for children to cut out and send. However, once the cards are removed from the book, there is often nothing to identify them as a Whitman card.

Originally selling for just pennies apiece, they are still a bargain in today's collectible market. I have paid as little as twenty-five cents for a simple unadorned card and as much as two dollars for a flocked or unusual card.

Whitman offered greeting cards for holidays other than Christmas, such as Valentine's Day and Easter, but far fewer of these can be found. Most of those that I have seen have flocking and are children oriented. Much to my surprise, Whitman also had a line of bridge tallies in 1939 for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year parties. Those for Christmas are sweet and look like miniature Christmas cards with red/white and green/white silk-like cords and tassels. One set's theme is the

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Scottish Terrier. I thought that surely this set was inspired by Fala, President Roosevelt's constant White House companion and part of his public image. However, Fala was not born and given to FDR until the following year. Another set of tallies has the traditional holiday symbols of a candle, poinsettias, bells, and holly.

Twenty-three years and a collection of more than one thousand different cards later, I want to thank Don for bringing to my attention these colorful Racine greetings and for the fun I've had looking for them. My Christmas letter to Santa this year will ask him to please find for me some of the earliest cards printed by Western or any of the later religious cards with Sister Monica's paintings.

Roberta Fiene

The illustrations and decorations in this newsletter were taken from Whitman and Artists and Writers Guild Christmas cards.

COLLEGE AVENUE BRICKS

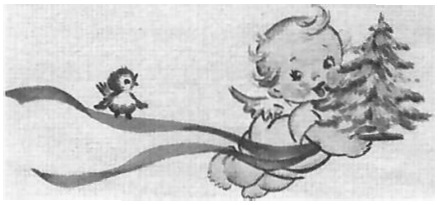
This summer the City of Racine made the decision to repair areas of College Avenue located in Racine's Southside Historic District. The most serious at-risk area was at the intersection of College Avenue and Fifteenth Street. Their recommendation was to use a stamped-concrete imitation brick for the repair instead of using original brick pavers.

A meeting was arranged for interested residents to preview this imitation brick. After the meeting, it was determined that the city would get three bids; if the bids were similar to the cost of repairing the areas with brick, they would utilize brick. If there was a large discrepancy in the cost of using brick, the community would be given the opportunity to fundraise for the necessary repairs.

Paul and Mary Zens, College Avenue residents, have worked diligently on researching and saving the College Avenue brick street over the years. In 2003, when College Avenue was threatened with re-surfacing, they gathered signatures from area residents imploring the city to save the historic street. "Grinding off the surface of the bricks to resurface a street can cause the underlying bricks to disintegrate when water freezes", said Paul Zens. He hopes that one day College Avenue will be restored with a continuous ribbon of bricks.

The Zens found the city engineer of Rock Island, Illinois, with seventeen miles of brick streets, willing to share their information. This data included inspection schedules, maintenance, and techniques on how and when to repair historic brick streets.

Preservation Racine commends Mark Yehlen, the new commissioner of public works, and the City of Racine for the correct repair at College Avenue and Fifteenth Street, utilizing historic brick pavers that the city had in storage, and for their continued commitment to protect the historic character of College Avenue.



FROM THE PRESIDENT

In our fall 2011 newsletter, it was announced that Preservation Racine was hosting a bus tour to the William Heald house in Glen Ellyn, Illinois. This privately-owned residence is claimed to be an original Frank Lloyd Wright design by enthusiasts who have formed the "Rediscovering Wright Project," which promotes the Heald house as an authentic Wright design. This organization maintains that primary documentary evidence exists to support the claim that the house is the result of Frank Lloyd Wright authorship.

Preservation Racine was extended an invitation to tour the home by Richard Johnson, a friend of the current owner and a founding member of the Rediscovering Wright Project. Mr. Johnson also provided our organization with information that was reproduced in our newsletter to promote the tour. In announcing the tour, the newsletter stated: "This one-of-a-kind Frank Lloyd Wright residence was one of the first commissions he took on in 1911/12 after returning to Chicago from Europe. This design was the precursor to Fallingwater and is beautifully sited on a hill above Lake Ellyn."

Soon after the distribution of the newsletter, a few members contacted me to inquire further about the home, since the dwelling is not recognized by the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation and could not be found listed in some reference volumes on Wright designs. Moreover, other Wright scholars believe Preservation Racine made a serious error when it stated that the Heald residence *is* an authentic Wright design and *is* a precursor to Fallingwater, since debate on those allegations continues to take place in literature, websites, and blogs devoted to Wright research.

The language as printed in the newsletter was hurriedly inserted to promote the tour and meet a publication deadline, nothing more. It was not until questions and criticisms were raised about the choice of language in the newsletter that the organization was made aware of the lingering debate over whether Wright was the designer. There is a good lesson to be learned in this instance: the organization should not have hurriedly printed narrative to meet a deadline without (1) knowing whether the narrative could be substantiated and (2) understanding the full potential consequences for it. We made a mistake by seeming to state facts that are in dispute.

It is *not* the intention of Preservation Racine to enter into the debate over the authenticity of the Heald residence; neither is it supporting or denying the claims of either side in the scholarly debate concerning whether Frank Lloyd Wright designed the home for his friend and fellow Unitarian Church member, William Heald. While several members of this organization (including a few board members) are friends with Richard Johnson and his group of Heald home enthusiasts, these friendships also do not constitute, or reflect, any *formal* position or support by Preservation Racine as an organization to claims made by Mr. Johnson, the Rediscovering Wright Project, or by any other Wright-related individual or organization.

The bus tour to Glen Ellyn has been postponed until next spring. In addition to visiting the Heald home, members of Preservation Racine will have the opportunity to visit the Sterling Morton Library in Lisle, Illinois, on the grounds of the Morton Arboretum to see the *Jens Jensen: Landscapes for People* exhibit, which runs through September 1, 2012. The Morton Library archive houses drawings by Jens Jensen for the Washington Park commission in Racine. These will be made available for us to view during the tour. A special notice about this tour will be sent to members next spring.

As always, thank you for your continued support of Preservation Racine and its activities.

Steven K. Rogstad

DEKOVEN HISTORIC MARKERS

This summer seven historic markers were installed on the grounds of The DeKoven Center.

The proceeds of Preservation Racine's 1996 Tour of Historic Places were earmarked for a donation to The DeKoven Center. Don Rintz, a Preservation Racine board member at the time, made a motion that we should provide historical markers for the buildings at The DeKoven Center. Each marker would emphasize the significance of the building, the architectural style, and the original use.

The committee sought bids for the markers from a number of companies. A Canadian company had the most competitive price. Bob Graves of Graves Sign Company ordered the markers and installed them this past summer.

The design of the markers is patterned after the bronze marker inside Taylor Hall. The new bronze markers are 16 inches by 20 inches. Bob Hartmann, PR member and owner of Hartmann Design, Inc., suggested that in lieu of concrete, the markers be mounted on a more substantial stone that would withstand the Wisconsin weather variants. Through Halquist Stone in Sussex, Wisconsin, a New England Bedford limestone was selected for the bases.

Max Dershem, director of The DeKoven Center, requested that the markers be placed inside of the quadrangle and made the final decision on their placement by each building.

Henry Wellner, a volunteer master gardener at The DeKoven Center, has carefully placed plantings around the markers to protect them and enhance their appearance.

The total cost for the seven markers, the stone, and their installation was $9,900.

Many individuals contributed to this project and should be proud of the final result. They are Don Rintz, Dorothy Osborne, Bob Hartmann, Mary Whitman, Roberta Fiene, Tom Yagelsky, Barbara Walter, Robin Sutherland Coventry, Charles Rice, and Vivian Merlo.

The text for each marker follows:

Great Hall and Assembly Hall Originally called the Refectory, the Great Hall was built adjacent to Kemper Hall in 1871 to provide a separate dining hall for the college. The arched entrances and windows and vaulted ceilings are typical of the Gothic Revival style. Stained glass windows donated by the college's graduating classes illuminate the dining hall.

The Assembly Hall and Recitation Rooms were built adjacent to Park Hall in 1872 along with what was described as "the central structure" at that time. This completed the east side of the quadrangle, unbroken except by an archway in the center.

Kemper Hall " In the spring of 1857, so prosperous had the institution become financially and in respect to number of students, that a second building was declared necessary..." is recorded in *History of Racine*, 1879. The local citizenry raised $12,000 and Kemper Hall was erected about 240 feet south of Park Hall. It was named for David Jackson Kemper (1789-1870), the first bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Wisconsin and an incorporator of Racine College. It is unknown when a third story was added to its north and south wings.

By 1859, the year Kemper Hall was completed, the college had graduated forty-three students. That same year, a grammar school was added through a union of St. John's Hall of Delafield, Wisconsin, and the Rev. Dr. James DeKoven (1831-1879) assumed the college presidency, beginning a twenty-year leadership which brought the college its finest years.

Park Hall Park Hall was built in 1852. It is the first building erected in what became the east side of the quadrangle. Gothic Revival in style, it has a three-story center section with a short crenellated tower over the entrance and two-story wings on the north and south.

The Rev. Dr. Roswell Park, the first president of the college and for whom the building is named, described it thus in his first annual catalogue, "The central part, which projects to the front, contains four large recitation rooms, besides a chapel, with open roof, occupying the whole of the upper story,

and a kitchen and dining room in the basement. There are ten rooms in each wing designed for students' dormitories." In January 1864, it burned, with the exception of one wing, and was restored that same year.

Collegiate Church of St. John St. John's Chapel was built in 1864 at the center of what was to become the college's quadrangle. In the antiphonal style, rows of pews face the center aisle. On the north and south walls, stained glass windows depict Christ's apostles. At the rear of the nave is a choir loft and pipe organ. The cream brick building's steep gables are trimmed with ornamental brickwork, as are the windows and entrances. The exterior bottom of the chapel is studded with 86 class memorials dating from 1869-1929.

School life centered around daily services as part of life at Racine College. Students attended chapel twice a day and a vested choir sang during evensong.

The Rev. Dr. Roswell Park, the founder and first president of Racine College, is buried to the east of the chapel. On the south side of the chapel is the tomb of the Rev. Dr. James DeKoven, the second president of Racine College and an Anglican saint.

Taylor Hall Taylor Hall was built in 1867 with a bequest from Racine residents Isaac and Emerline Taylor. Designed in the same Gothic Revival style as Park Hall, Kemper Hall, and Saint John's Chapel, it provided space for five classrooms, a library, dormitory space for fifty boys, and apartments for the warden and headmaster. The *College Mercury* of April 1, 1869, noted that the building was "well ventilated, well warmed,... the floor carpeted with Brussels or some other fine material, the walls hung with beautiful pictures, and the rest of the furniture to correspond." A fire in 1875 left only the walls standing, but with the support of the citizens of Racine, it was immediately rebuilt.

A tall crested top with four clock faces once surmounted the four-story tower on the west side of the building. The clock's bells rang each hour, and in 1879 their solemn peal was for the funeral of the Rev. Dr. DeKoven.

Gymnasium and Natatorium The gymnasium was built in 1875. A two-storied, dormered wing north of the building contained a science laboratory and an art studio. The entire building burned in 1888 and was rebuilt that same year.

From the early years, Racine College encouraged a wholesome athletic life. The college fielded a number of teams, including cricket, track, football, baseball, tennis, basketball, and swimming.

In 1910 the wing that now houses the indoor swimming pool was begun. This was the final building constructed on the campus.

Laundry and Servants' Building Located at the south end of the college quadrangle, this simple cream brick structure was built in 1876 to house the laundry and servants' quarters.

Great Hall and Assembly Hall marker

WISCONSIN HISTORICAL MARKER

A Wisconsin State Historical marker, which will explain the history of the complex, will be installed between Wisconsin Avenue and the east side of the quadrangle. After extensive research, the written history has been submitted to the State Historical Society. After the wording is confirmed and approved, Preservation Racine will be able to place an order and have this last marker installed. Preservation Racine anticipates the cost of this additional marker to be about $1700.

A MODERN HISTORY TOUR

Preservation Racine's secretary and Racine native, Joshua Drew, moved back to Racine in 2010. He is an enthusiastic fan of mid-twentieth century Modern architecture and purchased the retirement home designed by Edgar Tafel, a Frank Lloyd Wright apprentice, in 1949 for Louis and Marie Hamilton. Louis Hamilton and his partners developed two businesses in Racine: Hamilton Beach and Dumore. These companies helped to make Racine the fractional motor capital of the world. Joshua offered to open his house in Manree Park for this year's 36th annual Tour of Historic Places. His generous offer was the catalyst for the theme, Modern History.

The tour featured two prominent Racine architects, John Randal McDonald and Hans M. Geyer. McDonald began his architectural work in Racine in 1949 after receiving his master's degree in architecture from Yale. Current owner, Alissa Swire, opened the doors to her one-of-a-kind McDonald house, Riverhome or "Ogawa-uchi," commissioned by Richard J. and Ada Christensen in 1952. McDonald's original design featured an indoor/outdoor reflecting pool with underwater lighting. This pool has been replaced with a dry river of stones that flows from indoor to outside.

The second McDonald house featured on the tour was built in 1953 and was the second Racine house built for the architect's family. It is now owned by Eugene Szymczak. McDonald commented about this house's design once, stating, "I designed it as a challenge, to prove that a home like this can be built in a settled neighborhood, and still be adapted to a modern American life." At this house tour goers were treated to viewing a sunken living room, indoor reflecting pool, carport, and Zen garden.

Jane Cascio purchased her Hans and Estelle Geyer house, built in 1964, from the Geyer family. This was the second family residence Geyer designed for himself in Racine, and it was constructed on the site of the "Spring House" for the Wilnette Spring Water Bottling Company. This house also features natural materials: stone, brick, and wood with large windows on three sides flooding the house with light and magnificent views of the surrounding woods and ravine.

Renquist Design now occupies the Tudor style house built in 1959 for William Horlick Sidley and his wife June. It was inspired by a house the Sidleys saw on a trip to Europe. The people at Renquist Design continue to maintain the elegant interior and exterior of this significant building.

Two older buildings were showcased during the tour. The 1845 Thomas and Katherine Bones house owned by Nicholas and Dr. AnnMari Baldukas exhibited how a historically rich farmhouse could be updated and made "modern" for the twenty-first century. This house features the latest technology in plumbing, heating, electricity, and insulation. All new cabinetry and woodwork was designed with consideration of the historic appearance of the house.

The congregation of the First United Methodist Church welcomed us to celebrate their 175th anniversary with them. The church history was well researched and displayed for all to enjoy. Their hospitality was warm and gracious. Jim Mercier's special exhibit of Johnson's Wax the Early Years, the afternoon hospitality, and the post-tour potluck supper were all enjoyed in this wonderful edifice.

Each year's tour benefits Preservation Racine with new research for our files, plumps our treasury, and yields new stories to be told. The stories of the Camperdown Elm Tree located on the grounds of the Bones House, the Wilnette Spring Water Bottling Company located on Spring Street, and of the Frank Bull barn moved from Main Street to Wilnette Spring Drive, were told with special exhibits. Linda O'Connell graciously wrote the story of the Frank Bull barn as dictated by Bob Johnson, and Don Ricchio allowed us to use his drawing of the Bull barn in the tour book.

Local florists provided beautiful floral arrangements for each building; Sturino Funeral Home covered the cost of the hospitality; Maresh-Meredith & Acklam Funeral Home paid for the cost of printing the tickets; Don Vander Leest produced the original drawings of the buildings on the tour; and Chuck Vallone took care of photography. Over 150 volunteers were needed to be committee chairmen, house guides, and to help coordinate this event. We greatly appreciate all of the owners for allowing us to come into their

homes. We could not have done it without you!!!

In spite of the rain, our guests were treated to some one-of-a-kind buildings with beautiful interiors, exteriors, and gardens. Our gross income was $10,359.00 with a net income of $4852.68. This year we had the added expense of $744.96 for new large advertising signs and hardware. They are beautiful and should last for many years.

Vivian Merlo
Robin Sutherland Coventry
Tour Co-Chairmen

PRESERVATION RACINE

Published quarterly by
Preservation Racine, Inc.
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Racine, WI 53401

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IN MEMORIAM
Robert M. Johnson
March 26, 1921 to September 1, 2011

On September 1 of this year, Preservation Racine lost a longtime member, Robert M. Johnson. A creditable local historian, Bob was a willing and generous resource for member researchers. His mind held an amazing amount of Racine history and he had a vast collection of local historical materials and memorabilia which were readily available to anyone with a question. Amazingly indefatigable, his last few months in hospice were involved in closing a chapter on the relocation of the Frank Bull barn.

His outreach efforts benefitted schools and community organizations giving his audiences opportunities to hear and see history as an enjoyable subject and consequently acquiring a better understanding of Racine.

He was a strong family man and for many years, during which he endured major health issues, he was a devoted caregiver to his wife, Mary Ellen.

An inspiration to us all, Bob will be sorely missed. Adieu.

CENTURY BUILDINGS

In May, in honor of National Preservation Month, Preservation Racine will host its twenty-fifth annual presentation of Century Building certificates. The Century Building committee is looking for nominations of buildings that are at least one hundred years old, are located in the City or County of Racine, and have been well maintained. If you would like to nominate a building, please call or write Vivian Merlo, 634-0734 or viviang@aol.com

Unlocking the Mysteries of the "Christmas Tree Ship"

During the nineteenth century Chicago was one of the busiest shipping ports in the world. A Great Lakes ship carried nearly every commodity that passed through the bustling city, and Christmas trees were no exception. Each year several sailing ships ended their season by loading evergreens in northern Wisconsin or Michigan's Upper Peninsula and setting sail for Chicago, where they offloaded their trees to end their shipping season.

Many Christmas tree ships sold their cargo to wholesalers. Other captains, however, turned their ships into floating tree lots along the Chicago River, welcoming customers aboard and taking great pride and pleasure in their business. One of these captains was Herman Schueneman who, each November, loaded the schooner *Rouse Simmons* with evergreens in Thompson, Michigan. After sailing to Chicago, he moored his vessel to a downtown pier, hoisted a decorated tree up the mast and strung electric lights throughout the rigging, turning his ship into a large Christmas ornament. Schuenemann gave away many of his trees to churches and the city's poor, an act that earned him the nickname "Captain Santa."

In November 1912, however, the *Rouse Simmons* never reached Chicago. Lost with all hands somewhere on the lake, the location of the *Rouse Simmons*' wreck would remain a mystery for 59 years until Milwaukee diver Kent Bellrichard discovered the vessel remains in 165 feet of water 12 miles northeast of Two Rivers. The discovery solved the mystery of where the *Rouse Simmons* sank, but additional questions remained: why did the ship sink, and what happened during its final moments. These questions provided the focus of a two-week archaeological survey by the Society's maritime Preservation and Archaeology Program in 2006, which led to a listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Ship's Final Moments

While it may never be known for certain what transpired during the *Rouse Simmons'* final moments, divers uncovered several clues that shed light on what happened just before the ship slipped beneath the waves. By examining the historical and archaeological record, the Society's divers pieced together a more complete story of what happened that fateful day. Last seen by the Kewaunee Life-Saving Station, the *Rouse Simmons* was flying a distress flag five miles offshore while being driven southward by a northwest gale. With no chance of catching the vessel, the Kewaunee station's captain called the Two Rivers Life-Saving Station, which immediately launched a lifeboat to intercept the distressed vessel and bring the crew to safety. As the lifeboat motored onto the lake, however, the *Rouse Simmons* had vanished. The lifeboat crew searched for several hours without a trace of the ship. Facing darkness and a snowstorm, they finally returned to port.

Society researchers re-created the lifeboat's search pattern and compared it with the *Rouse Simmons*' location today. They discovered that the Two Rivers lifeboat completely encircled the *Rouse Simmons* and was never more than a few miles from where the wreck lies. With a reported six miles of visibility that day, the lifesaving crew would have seen it were it still afloat.

Exploring the Shipwreck

As the Society's divers descended on the wreck site, they noticed the *Rouse Simmons* was not heading south as was last reported, but was facing northwest, or back toward the shoreline and a small bay. The divers began looking for clues as to why the *Rouse Simmons* had changed course and they found what they were looking for at the ship's bow. Tools for handling the anchors and chains were lying about the deck. The windlass, the winch used to raise and lower the anchors, was being prepared for lowering the port side anchor. Using this evidence, divers also discovered the port anchor lying 170 feet north of the bow, meaning the ship had turned towards shore to head for shelter. Before the crew could drop anchor and ride out the storm, however, large waves sent the *Rouse Simmons* and its crew to the bottom.

Commemorating the Shipwreck Site

Each November the *Rouse Simmons* Day ceremony in Two Rivers commemorates the ship's sinking. On November 21 the Society's Maritime Preservation and Archaeology Program unveiled a Maritime Trails Marker funded by University of Wisconsin Sea Grant Institute at a dedication ceremony at Neshotah Beach, the same beach where for years following the wreck, Christmas trees washed up along the shoreline. The city of Two Rivers and Rogers Street Fishing Village Museum assisted in the marker's installation.

Columns. The Newsletter of the Wisconsin Historical Society, November/December 2009

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With much appreciation and gratitude Preservation Racine would like to acknowledge the patron and corporate donations that helped to make this year's tour profitable. We have added in kind donations and encourage our members to support our donors.

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